

The Ehlers e-Newsletter

Monday, June 2, 2003

Previously in the U.S. House of Representatives

EHLERS URGES REASSESSMENT OF MSA ALIGNMENT – Arguing that a move to break up a federally established West Michigan consortium of governments could have "devastating and lasting effects" on the local economy, Congressman Vernon J. Ehlers joined with Congressman Pete Hoekstra of Holland to urge federal officials to rethink their decision. In a letter to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Mitch Daniels, Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, and Hoekstra, R-Holland, said the OMB's proposed plan to break up the Kent-Ottawa-Muskegon-Allegan (KOMA) Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) into four different areas could damage efforts to apply for federal funding, regional marketing and attracting new business to the area.

For more information, please read the press release on Congressman Ehlers' webpage:
http://www.house.gov/ehlers/press_releases/052303_MSA_Letter.html

PRESIDENT SIGNS JOBS AND GROWTH PLAN, UNEMPLOYMENT

EXTENSION – President Bush signed the Jobs and Growth Tax Reconciliation Act of 2003 on Wednesday. This new law will provide substantial tax relief to 136 million American taxpayers. The president also signed H.R. 2185 on Wednesday, which extends unemployment benefits through December 31, 2003. Both pieces of legislation were approved by the House on May 23 and both were supported by Congressman Ehlers.

AIDS LEGISLATION APPROVED BY CONGRESS, SIGNED BY PRESIDENT –

Seeking to help foreign countries battling an AIDS epidemic, the U.S. Congress approved legislation that will provide up to \$3 billion annually over the next five years for HIV/AIDS care, treatment and prevention in those countries already facing crisis of unprecedented proportions, and also in those countries with alarming recent increases in HIV prevalence, while also encouraging debt relief for those countries. Congressman Ehlers supported the measure, which was approved by the House on May 21 and was signed into law by President Bush last Tuesday.

THIS WEEK IN THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MONDAY, JUNE 2, 2003

On Monday, the House will meet at 2 p.m. for legislative business. Votes will be postponed until 6:30 p.m.

Suspensions (5 bills):

(Bills on suspension are generally considered non-controversial and have reduced debate time, but require a two-thirds majority vote to be passed.)

- 1) **H.Res. 159 - Expressing profound sorrow on the occasion of the death of Irma Rangel**, the first Mexican-American woman elected to the Texas House of Representatives.
- 2) **H.Res. 195 - Congratulating Sammy Sosa of the Chicago Cubs for hitting 500 major league home runs.**

- 3) **H.R. 1465 - General Charles Gabriel Post Office Designation Act** (Iron Station, N.C.).
- 4) **H.Res. 231 - Supporting the goals and ideals of Peace Officers Memorial Day:** expresses the support of the House of Representatives of the goals and ideals of Peace Officers Memorial Day to honor federal, state and local peace officers killed or disabled in the line of duty and calls upon the people of the United States to observe such a day with appropriate ceremonies and respect.
- 5) **H.Con.Res. 172 - Supporting the 20th Annual National Tourism Week**

TUESDAY, JUNE 3, 2003

On Tuesday, the House will meet at 10:30 a.m. for morning hour and 12 noon for legislative business.

Suspensions (4 bills):

- 1) **H.R. 2143 - Unlawful Internet Gambling Funding Prohibition Act:** Directs the federal functional regulators to prescribe regulations limiting the acceptance of any bank instrument for unlawful Internet gambling. It defines certain terms for purposes of the Act and establishes regulatory enforcement authorities. Its primary purpose is to give the Federal functional regulators a new, more effective tool for combating offshore Internet gambling sites that illegally extend their services to U.S. residents via the Internet.
- 2) **S. 222 - Zuni Indian Tribe Water Rights Settlement Act of 2003:** *Information on this bill not available at time of publication.*
- 3) **S. 273 - Grand Teton National Park Land Exchange Act:** *Information on this bill not available at time of publication.*
- 4) **H.R. 1082 - Birch Bayh Federal Building and United States Courthouse Designation Act** (Indianapolis, Ind.).

H.J.Res. 4 - Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States authorizing the Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States: A proposed Constitutional amendment stating: "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." Once the measure is ratified, Congress could then consider implementing legislation in order to proscribe such conduct. *(A Constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds majority – 290 votes – for passage.)*

WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY, JUNE 4 AND 5, 2003

On Wednesday and Thursday, the House will meet at 10 a.m. for legislative business.

Suspensions (4 bills):

- 1) **H.Con.Res. 177 - Recognizing and commending the members of the United States Armed Forces and their leaders, and the allies of the United States and their armed forces, who participated in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq and recognizing the continuing dedication of military families and employers and defense civilians and contractors and the countless communities and patriotic organizations that lent their support to the Armed Forces during those operations.**

- 2) **H.Res. 201 - Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that our Nation's businesses and business owners should be commended for their support of our troops and their families as they serve our country in many ways, especially in these days of increased engagement of our military in strategic locations around our Nation and around the world.**
- 3) **H.R. 361 - Sports Agent Responsibility and Trust Act:** Designates certain conduct by sports agents related to the signing of contracts to represent student athletes as unfair and deceptive acts or practices to be regulated by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Additionally, the bill provides states with the authority to bring civil action against violators in a district court and provides universities with a right of action against the athlete agent for damages resulting from a violation of the act.
- 4) **H.R. 1954 - Armed Forces Naturalization Act of 2003:** Reduces the military service requirement to apply for naturalization during peace time from three years to one year while maintaining the requirement that a military member must still establish their worthiness for expedited naturalization through a period of honorable military service during peace time. Because the bill permits a military member to apply for naturalization after one year of military service during peace time, the bill states that the military member may be denaturalized if the military member is discharged from the military under other than honorable conditions during the first five years of military service. Military members who apply for naturalization during named hostilities may also be denaturalized for other than honorable discharge during the first five years of military service. For soldiers, this bill also waives the fees for the naturalization petition or naturalization certificate, along with related State fees, and waives the fee for the posthumous citizenship application.

H.R. 760 - Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003: *Information on this bill not available at time of publication.*

H.R. 1119 - Family Time Flexibility Act: Gives working men and women more power and control over their lives by allowing them, through a voluntary agreement with their employer, to choose paid time off as compensation for working overtime hours. The flexible working arrangement, known as "family time," is designed to help working men and women achieve a greater balance between family and work obligations and spend more time with their families.

The Fair Labor Standards Act (enacted in 1938) prohibits private sector employers from offering their employees the choice of opting for paid time off as compensation for working overtime hours, although public sector employers and employees have long enjoyed this flexibility.

The bill gives employers the option of offering employees the choice of paid time off in lieu of cash wages for overtime hours worked if the employee prefers to take compensatory time instead of overtime pay. An employee is always entitled to opt for the overtime cash wages.

An employee opting to take paid compensatory time in lieu of overtime cash wages receives paid time off at a rate of one-and-one-half hours of compensatory time per hour of “overtime” pay earned. For example, an employee working 48 hours in a week would receive either eight hours of pay at time-and-a-half or 12 hours of paid time off.

There would have to be a written agreement between the employer and the employee, entered into knowingly and voluntarily by the employee (where the employee is represented by a union, the agreement to offer compensatory time must be part of the collective bargaining agreement negotiated between the union and the employer). A compensatory time agreement may not be made a condition of employment.

As with cash overtime pay, compensatory time accrues at one-and-one-half times the employee’s regular rate of pay for each hour worked over 40 in a seven-day period. The legislation in no way affects the sanctity of the 40-hour work week or change the way by which overtime pay is calculated.

Employees could accrue up to 160 hours of compensatory time each year. An employer would be required to pay cash wages (i.e., “cash out”) any accrued, unused compensatory time at the end of each year. The provisions of the bill sunset after five years to ensure that Congress has the opportunity review how employers and workers are using the benefit.

H.R. 1474 - Check Clearing for the 21st Century Act: Modernizes the U.S. payments system by allowing check images to be transported electronically between financial institutions for payment, obviating the need for physical transfer of the original check. The legislation provides for the creation of a new negotiable instrument, the substitute check, which will facilitate electronic presentment of checks while also ensuring that individuals or banks that do not wish to accept electronic images can receive a paper check. The legislation requires that a substitute check accurately represents all the information on the front and back of the original check as of the time it was truncated. Additionally, a substitute check must bear all the endorsements of the original check and must clearly indicate that it is a legal copy of the original.

FRIDAY, JUNE 6, 2003

On Friday, no votes are expected in the House.

Historical Tidbits

On June 3 ...

1800 - John Adams moved to Washington, DC. He was the first President to live in what later became the capital of the United States.

On June 4 ...

1919 - The U.S. Senate passed the Women's Suffrage bill.

1947 - The House of Representatives approved the Taft-Hartley Act.

On June 5 ...

1794 - The U.S. Congress prohibited citizens from serving in any foreign armed forces.

1917 - American men began registering for the World War I draft.

1981 - In the U.S., the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that five gay men in Los Angeles were suffering from a rare pneumonia found in patients with weakened immune systems. They were the first recognized cases of what came to be known as AIDS.

On June 6 ...

1932 - In the U.S., the first federal tax on gasoline went into effect. It was a penny per gallon.

1934 - U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Securities Exchange Act, which established the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

(Please do not respond to this e-mail. To send a message to Congressman Ehlers, please visit our website at <http://www.house.gov/ehlers> and click on "Write Your Rep.")